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Opposing Strands: The Mediterranean as Site of Cultural Conflict Around 1900

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Abstract

From antiquity to the Third Republic, this article follows visual and literary representations that measured space, time and ideological oppositions that spawned an image of the Mediterranean as an area of transmission and cultural tension. It focuses on three theorists: the head of Action Française, Charles Maurras; the novelist Louis Bertrand; and critic and cultural impresario Joachim Gasquet. Each contributed to the formation of an image of the Mediterranean basin as the birthplace of European heritage and a battlefield in a struggle against the forces of democracy and cultural hybridization.

Résumé

De l'antiquité à la Troisième République, cet article examine des représentations plastiques et littéraires qui mesurèrent l'espace, le temps et les oppositions idéologiques d'où découla une image de la Méditerranée en tant qu'aire de transmission et de tension culturelle. Il se concentre sur trois théoriciens : le chef de l'Action française, Charles Maurras; le romancier Louis Bertrand; et le critique et impresario culturel Joachim Gasquet. Chacun contribua à la formation d'une image du bassin méditerranéen comme lieu de naissance du patrimoine européen et champ de bataille dans une lutte contre les forces de la démocratie et de l'hybridation culturelle.

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For the uninitiated, the Quai des Belges in the Old Port of Marseille conceals its status as a civilizational landmark rather effectively. Embedded in the middle of the esplanade in front of the sea and opposite a "Burger King", however, the curious stroller will discover a very discreet commemorative plaque with this resounding inscription: "Here around the year 600 BC Greek sailors landed [,] coming from Phocaea, a Greek city in Asia Minor. They founded Marseille from where civilization radiated in the West."[1] The plaque was unveiled in 1952 by Gaston Defferre, deputy of the Bouches-du-Rhône, future mayor of Marseille and *éminence grise* of the Socialist party. It claims for the city a critical role in the birth of European culture and links its foundation by sailors from Ionia to the establishment of a Hellenic civilization which, with Latin contributions introduced by later Roman invaders, shone throughout France and across the Mediterranean basin.

The plaque echoes a debate that was in full swing around 1900 and had important ramifications, especially in conservative circles and among zealots of political and cultural regionalism. At the time, identifying France with a classical culture, initially imported from Greece and deepened after the later invasion by Rome, sparked a lively debate on the respective character of these Hellenic and Latin contributions, on their diffusion and survival in contemporary France, and on the affinities that remained between the so-called Latin countries—France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Romania. In all of this, the Mediterranean serves as a controversial point of mediation and exchange, especially since it not only introduced so-called classical cultures into countries ostensibly revitalized by their contribution, but also exposed them to exogenous influences vilified by the right, which feared an apparent contamination of the Latin tradition coming from the east and the south. In questioning what was at stake in this debate, this article focuses on the intervention of three figures—the royalist ideologue Charles Maurras (1868–1952), the novelist Louis Bertrand (1866–1941), and the Provençal poet and critic Joachim Gasquet (1873–1921). All three, linked by personal relationships and ideological affinities, are at the heart of a discourse on the nature and extent of a Mediterranean civilization, which mobilized artists and intellectuals for whom these questions directly influenced their conception of the authority that should preside over the political and cultural destinies of the country. All three, too, claim a classicizing vision of French culture whose particular nuances influence each man's understanding of the link between antiquity and the modern world. Maurras exalts the classical Mediterranean as a melting pot of a refined and sober civilization at the antipodes of contemporary, democratic and cosmopolitan France. Conversely, Bertrand and Gasquet, with distinct priorities, found in the ancient world a source of savage energy capable of inspiring a national renaissance in the face of ambient decadence. If this Nietzschean-inflected vision sees the Mediterranean as a source of renewal for the modern world, for the head of Action française Atticism and its heritage are both a refuge against modernity and an incentive to rediscover a fantasized realm of discipline, order and harmony of which the Greeks are believed to have provided the model.

Massilia, Greek Colony (Fig. 1), the monumental canvas by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes inaugurated at the Palais Longchamp in 1869, essentially sums up the myth of Phocaean origins and its cultural repercussions in the nineteenth century.[2]

Unveiled in the same year as the Suez Canal was opened, it depicts settlers establishing themselves on the coast south of today's city. In the background, a team of masons builds a temple dedicated to Diana. Towards the middle of the composition, a delicate and slender tree begins to bloom, symbol of the birth of a new and refined culture on this arid land. The natives, however, are conspicuous by their absence, an oversight all the more striking as one of the most widespread legends concerning

[1] According to a seventeenth-century inscription on the Hôtel de ville, Marseille is the "daughter of Phocea, sister of Rome, rival of Carthage, and emulator of Athens." All translations are by the author.

[2] See Musée des beaux-arts, Marseille, 1984, *Puvis de Chavannes et le musée des beaux-arts de Marseille*, and Aimée Brown Price, *Puvis de Chavannes, vol. 2. A Catalogue raisonné of the painted work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 140–46.

Figure. 1. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Massilia, Greek Colony*, ca. 1868–69, oil on canvas attached to the wall, 4.2 x 5.6 m. Musée des beaux-arts, Palais Longchamp, Marseille. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

the arrival of the Greeks tells of the marriage between the Phocaean sailor Protis and the daughter of a Ligurian king, Gyptis, a union that seals an alliance between the Greek travelers and the Gallic population. Puvis's version, which involves a purely classical genealogy, links him to one of his greatest Provençal admirers and a leader of the Latinist movement around 1900, Charles Maurras.[3]

In a text written towards the end of the 1890s and published in 1901 in his hymn to the Hellenic tradition, *Anthinéa*, the head of the royalist movement Action française tells the story of Aristarchê, a follower of Diana at Ephesus and first high priestess of the temple to Diana in Massilia. Evoking an ancient bas-relief found in 1804 near his birthplace in Martigues (Fig. 2), Maurras sees in it the image of Aristarchê embarking from Ephesus with the future founders of Massilia, carrying a statue of Diana on her shoulder.

Leaving Greek soil, Aristarchê embodies the transmission of an entire civilization:

> what passes, what crosses the sea's garland on this oblique plank, is something other than a holy exalted woman, it is the body, it is the living soul of religion, and in this body, and in this soul, a tradition, a policy, a country, an intelligence, manners. [. . .] Marseille will raise mystical seeds locked in this breast and under this beautiful forehead.[4]

The city that will flourish from this seed carried from Ionia by Aristarchê and her companions attracts the praise of Maurras, for whom "Marseille was counted among the politest of the cities of Greece. Her aristocratic constitution, the wisdom

[3] See Charles Maurras, "Le Goût de Puvis de Chavannes," *La Gazette de France* 28 January 1895. On Mauuras's Latinism in relation to the Mediterranean, see Olivier Dard, "Charles Maurras, le fascisme, la latinité et la Méditerranée," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* [on-line version], 95, 2017, consulted 11 April 2021. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/cdlm/8880.

[4] Charles Maurras, *Anthinéa. D'Athènes à Florence* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion and Édouard Champion, 1901), 218–219.

Figure 2. Bas-relief of Aristarchê, reproduced in J. Charles-Roux, *Le Costume en Provence. Vol. 1, Période ancienne*, Lemerre, Rey et Ruat, 1907, p. 39. Photo: Author.

of her senators, were given as a model [. . .]. They praised her liberal hospitality, her frugality and her restraint. [. . .] This remarkable wisdom can be explained in one word. She was Athenian."[5]

Maurras had cultivated an admiration for Greece since his youth, which he spent in the company of the great authors of antiquity. A visit to Athens in 1896 intensified this reverence just as it reinforced his "hatred of democracy."[6] For Maurras, the superiority of Attic culture stems from its universality. It expresses itself in a clear and rational aesthetic language that achieves harmony and balance, sublimating nature while being deeply inspired by it. It is this harmony, which Maurras found in "the new and purer world [. . .] 'parallel' to reality"[7] evoked by Puvis de Chavannes, that Massilia inherited and which made Provence "the homeland of order, that is, of authority, of hierarchy, of inequalities and of naturally arranged freedoms."[8]

Marseille is the starting point of another journey that Maurras sketches out to demonstrate the superiority of classical Mediterranean culture. In an article published in *L'Ermitage* in January 1892, he cites an adventure by Pythias, a Phocaean explorer

[5] Maurras, *Anthinéa*. 219–220.
[6] Letter to Maurice Barrès (undated; June 1900) in Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès, *La République ou le roi. Correspondance inédite (1888-1923)* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 287.
[7] Maurras, "Le Goût de Puvis de Chavannes".
[8] Charles Maurras, *Quand les Français ne s'aimaient pas. Chronique d'une renaissance 1895-1905* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie nationale, 1916), 125. The chapter « Une Revue latine », was originally published in 1902.

active in the 4th century BCE famous for navigating the northern seas and discovering the mythical island of Thule.[9] In a dialogue with the statue of Pythias, a work by Auguste Ottin on the facade of the Marseille Stock Exchange, Maurras establishes a contrast between the territory bordering the Mediterranean, "simple, luminous and golden," and the disorder of nature around Thule where "formlessness and life are incessantly born from the mysterious confusion of chaos."[10] This opposition, manifested in an antithesis between southern light and northern mists, is both natural and moral. According to Pythias, confusion can be overcome by human will, which succeeds in distinguishing "the firm from the unstable and what must perish from immortal things."[11] Pythias expresses his regret for introducing man to a disordered nature, since this chaos has exerted a harmful moral influence on the evolution of culture. In fact, Maurras invokes the example of Pythias to refute Symbolist aesthetics, represented in this instance by an essay by Adolphe Retté, "Le Thulé des brumes." For Maurras, Thule represents the absence of order, the abandonment of self-control and respect for the rules imposed by the nature of things. He accuses the Symbolists of choosing confusion, unreason, withdrawal into oneself, the transitory effect rather than transcendent morality. These choices are the expression of a barbaric mentality, which contrasts with southern lucidity. Asking "What is it to be without the Law?," Maurras opposes Greco-Latin civilization, rational and classical, to an aesthetic and social anarchy that threatens to engulf the modern world and originates on the fringes of Europe, in Asia and the north.

The artistic options of the young Maurras affirm this promotion of classical and southern culture as a form of moral balm in the face of modernity, which he identifies with democracy in politics and subjectivity in art. At the start of his career, Maurras wrote in Provençal, a language in which he discerned, through its Latin roots, traces of Greek.[12] In 1888 he joined the Félibrige de Paris, a metropolitan branch of the movement founded in 1854 by Frédéric Mistral to strengthen Provençal identity and campaign for an "Empire of the Sun" bringing together all the Latin countries of the Mediterranean basin. This membership was reinforced in 1891 by the alliance between Maurras and the Franco-Greek poet Jean Moréas within the École romane, a literary group designed to oppose the hermeticism of the Symbolists with a classical clarity nourished by what Moréas calls "the unity of the art of the south of Europe."[13] According to Maurras, the sources of this reaction, rooted in southern civilization, are both diverse and homogeneous. "This mysterious rhythm, which extends from the south in ripples of light, can be consecrated with a thousand terms," he declared in 1891, "Latin, Felibrean, Italian, Hellenic, it is all the same. Jean Moréas, in recent months, wanted to call it 'Roman' and it was not without emotion that I heard that name."[14] The breadth of this definition, which is both geographical and cultural, erases a distinction between Hellenic and Roman on which Maurras insists in later texts and which moreover marks a certain tension in his definition of Latinity.

In an article on "La Guerre des Gaules" published in November 1901, Maurras exalts France's Greco-Roman ancestry. As an heir to Greece, Rome is said to have promoted the discipline, virility and reason that triumphed over the feminine, sentimental and anarchic character of the Celts. The Gallo-Roman mixture resulting from the conquest of Gaul ostensibly dissipated with the explosion of the French Revolution, which saw "Roman order" stifled by "Gallic tumult."[15] Maurras extols the "historical, intellectual and moral" heritage that links France to the imperial and religious traditions of Italy.[16] At the same time, however, he treats this heritage with

[9] See Monique Mund-Dopchie, *Ultima Thulé. Histoire d'un lieu et genèse d'un mythe* (Geneva: Droz, 2009); on Maurras, 382–83.
[10] Charles Maurras, "Le Repentir de Pythéas," *L'Ermitage* vol. 4, January 1892, 5, 4.
[11] Maurras, "Repentir," 6.
[12] See Stéphane Giocanti, *Charles Maurras félibre. L'itinéraire et l'oeuvre d'un chantre* (Paris: Louis de Montalte, 1995), 173.
[13] Quoted in Willem Geertrud Cornelis Byvanck, *Un Hollandais à Paris en 1891: sensations de littérature et d'art* (Paris: Perrin, 1892), 86. On the École romane, see Patrick McGuiness, *Poetry and Radical Politics in fin-de-siècle France. From Anarchism to Action française*, (Oxford University Press, 2015), 210–211.On Maurras and the Félibrige, see Victor Nguyen, "Maurras et le Félibrige. Éléments d'un problématique," 2009. http://maurras.net/pdf/divers/nguyen/nguyen_felibrige.pdf (accessed 4 May 2021).
[14] Charles Maurras, "Barbares et Romans," *La Plume* 3rd year, no. 53, 1 July 1891, 229.
[15] Charles Maurras, "La Guerre des Gaules," *La Gazette de France* 3 November 1901. In his article "Qu'est-ce que la civilisation?," *La Gazette de France* 8 September 1901, Maurras presents the French crown as the protector of this Greco-Roman tradition.
[16] On the ties between Latinism and Catholicism, see Charles Maurras, "Les Forces latines," preface to Marius André, *La Fin de l'empire espagnol d'Amérique* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie nationale, 1922), 15–20.

a certain ambivalence. In *Anthinéa*, he deplores the eclipse of the Greek patrimony, "this priceless good" whose "memorable impulse [. . .] has only been communicated to us rather weakly,"[17] by a much more ambiguous Roman tradition. This tradition, he points out, incorporated the legacy of the Greeks, though in an uncritically indiscriminate way. Maurras thus accuses Rome of renewing southern civilization while simultaneously undermining it. Once again, Maurras invokes a classical figure – the Syrian priestess Martha (c. 100 B.C.),[18] a companion of the Roman general Marius and emblem of this "contagion from Asia" that Maurras associates with Rome's dominance of the Provençal coast. Unlike Aristarchê, Martha represents everything that weakens the public spirit and inflames popular passions. Maurras blames the tenacious influence of "this barbarian from the East" for the defeat of Rome and, in the modern world, for "this awakening of the Jewish spirit and the impure biblical delirium that we ironically call the Reformation," and for the Revolution which it supposedly inspired. "All unreason comes from her," Maurras insists, "the defeat of the high traditions of the spirit, the return to savagery."[19] Martha, an inhabitant of "our swamps and the stagnant places in the region" around Martigues, a locality that bears her name,[20] infected the sparkling shores of the Provençal coast, transforming them physically and morally into a confused place similar to the murky seas off Thule.

Where does this tension come from, as Maurras struggles to reconcile his admiration for Rome with the repulsion he feels for imperial cosmopolitanism? It comes from the sea—from the Mediterranean, which connects the shores blessed by Greek civilization with what he sees as the sworn enemy of these Western values: that is, Semitic influence emanating from Asia, Greece's neighbor which ended up absorbing Ionia, the point of origin of Massilia and its influence across Europe. This tension is also explained by Maurras's skepticism towards the notion of a common ethnicity which links all Latin countries. In 1878 his master Mistral had invoked a Latin race, a "luminous race," and laments that "in the eclipse of your glory / always the world has mourned."[21] On the threshold of the twentieth century, in 1901, the Italian anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi announced the existence of *homo mediterraneus*, "the largest race in the world," but this so-called scientific discovery, like Mistral's lyrical evocation, did not convince the royalist leader, who wrote in 1902: "the main thing is that there is a Latin civilization, a Latin spirit, vehicle and complement of Hellenism, interpreter of Athenian reason and beauty, lasting monument of Roman strength."[22] The problem, at least around 1900, is that the community of nations that descended from Rome had nothing to excite admiration in Maurras, who was also unfavorable to the reputed source of Western civilization itself, the modern Greece ruled by a Danish prince, George I, King of the Hellenes. This disenchantment also colors his perception of Marseille, presented at the end of the Mediterranean odyssey recounted in *Anthinéa* as a fallen city: "We must be careful not to judge ancient Marseille by a corner of the modern city, the meeting place of the Levantines, negroes and Jews."[23] For Maurras, Massilia had succumbed to the offspring of Martha: according to his racist fantasy, the city had become a cosmopolitan crossroads—"the gateway to the east," to borrow the title of the mural in which Puvis de Chavannes confronted Massilia with its modern commercial successor (Fig. 3).

In describing this scene, Puvis highlights the port's status as a focal point for the peoples of the East. "On the deck of the ship," he writes, are "all the types representing the various races of the Levant. An Armenian, a Jew, a Greek, an Arab naturally come to stand and [. . .] they contemplate the Gallic Sea."[24] With the opening of the Suez Canal the Mediterranean's center of gravity had shifted, and Puvis's painting celebrates the increased trade that was to result from this technical feat. In the eyes of the anarchist

[17] Maurras, *Anthinéa*, 104.
[18] See Plutarch's 'Life of Caius Marius,' § 17.
[19] Maurras, *Anthinéa*, 230.
[20] Ibid., 227.
[21] Frédéric Mistral, "A la Raco Latino" in *Oeuvres poétiques complètes* (Aix-en-Provence: Edicioun Ramoun Berenguié, 1966), 2: 36–41.
[22] Charles Maurras, "Les Chansons provençales" in *L'Étang de Berre* (Paris: Édouard Champion,1920), 155. The text dates to June 1903.
[23] Maurras, *Anthinéa*, 219.
[24] Quoted in Marseilles, 1984, *Puvis de Chavannes*, 45.

Figure 3. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Marseille, Gateway to the East*, ca. 1868–69, oil on canvas attached to the wall, 4.2 x 5.6 m. Musée des beaux-arts, Palais Longchamp, Marseille. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

geographer Élisée Reclus, human mixing facilitated by the Mediterranean constituted a powerful lever for civilization. As he remarks in his *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* of 1887, "without this great mediating agent [. . .] which carries boats and distributes wealth, which puts peoples in touch with one another, all of us Westerners would have remained in a state of primitive barbarism."[25] Marseille itself attracted large numbers of immigrants—in 1896, 35% of its industrial workforce came from other countries, especially Italy.[26] Their arrival was not without provoking tensions, which sometimes erupted into violent clashes—notably with the infamous "Marseille Vespers" of June 1881 and the massacre of Italians in Aigues-Mortes two years later.[27]

This demographic transformation shapes the discourse of novelist Louis Bertrand, one of the champions of the Mediterranean and of a French revival brought about through the colonization of its African territories. Bertrand begins one of his earliest novels, *La Cina* of 1901, with a chapter entitled "Marseille, porte d'orient" where the two heroes, Michel and Claude, arrive in the city before leaving to become colonists in Algeria. Filled with enthusiasm, they visit the Palais Longchamp and contemplate Puvis's murals, before Claude expresses impatience at the abstraction of the work of art. "We have to forget about art, otherwise art will hide life from us! [. . .] We have to cast down everything, we have to remake ourselves from top to bottom!" And the two young men immerse themselves in the

[25] Quoted in Jean-Claude Izzo and Thierry Fabre, *La Méditerranée française* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2000), 33.
[26] See Musées de Marseille, 1991, *Marseille au XIX^e siècle. Rêves et triomphes*, 320.
[27] See Laurent Dornel, "Les Paradoxes de la xénophobie ouvrière. Immigration et violence à Marseille" in Stéphane Mourlane et Céline Regnard, *Les Batailles de Marseille. Immigrations, violences et conflits XIX^e-XX^e siècles* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2013), 137–47 and Céline Regnard, "Une société xénophobe? Marseille à la fin du XIX^e siècle" in loc. cit., 149–58.

city, where Bertrand conjures up streets teeming with foreigners: "The whole of the East was there as if at home."[28] Michel and Claude are captivated by the spontaneous energy of the working-class neighborhoods, which contrast with both Puvis's frigid vision at the Palais Longchamp and the decaying Franco-French society of Aix-en-Provence—here dismissed as "Aix-la-Morte"—with "these tables of officials and ruined petty nobles lingering in front of a grog on the terraces of cafes."[29] The tumult of the old port awakens in these young enthusiasts for a renewal of national energy "all the forgotten poetry of the Mediterranean."[30] It is in Algeria that they will discover a Latin tradition, which has preserved this energy and which is allegedly maintained by settlers from neighboring European countries.

For Bertrand, the salvation of French culture, the classic and Latin culture *par excellence*, depends on an infusion of energy that will save the country from democratic decadence by cultivating a new, healthy and virile aristocracy. Bertrand calls for a Latin alliance which will bring together the Mediterranean countries in a much more combative union than that envisaged by Mistral. In rallying them in the preface to a collection of poems, *Les Chants séculaires* by Joachim Gasquet, in 1903, Bertrand declares:

> Let us assert ourselves once again in the face of the universe, because it is too certain that, as direct heirs of Rome and Athens, *we Latins are civilization!* [. . .] Close your ranks, unite! Together, let us prepare the revenge of our race, which is necessary for peace as well as for the beauty of the world![31]

The classicism advocated by Bertrand takes a Dionysian tone at odds with the Apollonian idealism of Maurras, which the novelist describes in 1908 as an "emasculated aestheticism."[32] Already in 1897, in his thesis on *La Fin du classicisme et le retour à l'antique*, Bertrand had condemned the inability of classicists, represented by André Chénier in literature or Jacques-Louis David in painting, to capture "the eternal youth of the world" in their works. In his opinion, the lesson of Greece lies in the sensuality of its art, expressed more authentically by a Baroque artist like Diego Velázquez. This is how he extols *The Forge of Vulcan* (1630, Prado Museum) as a work that is inspired both by the "ancient gods" and by "the human crowd": "It is only through this intimate communion with nature and this divination of her Beauty that classicism was able to live and triumph."[33] Some ten years later, during a visit to Athens in 1906, Bertrand hammered home the point; underlining the distance that separates the modern world from ancient life and culture, he criticizes the nostalgia of "these so-called Latins, influenced in spite of themselves by frigid Germanic idealism" and insists on the fundamental hybridity of Greek art, which absorbs Asian and African influences. While drawing inspiration from their example, he insists, we must recognize our obligation to formulate a classical art that addresses the modern world, as the Greeks themselves had done: "the best lesson we can draw from these memories is to be and to remain good Westerners,—men of their century and of their country—as its sons were at the most truly Greek period in their history."[34]

Bertrand's classicism goes far beyond questions of style, however. For him, the Greco-Latin heritage serves as a weapon in a fight for the future of France, and even of Western civilization. The enemy is not only the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic world, it is also Islam—French colonization, he asserts, restores North Africa to its fundamental Latin identity and confronts the Arab influence which "only brought misery, endemic war and barbarism."[35] In novels published between 1899 and 1905 which make up his African cycle, Bertrand summons the nationals

[28] Louis Bertrand, *La Cina* (Paris: Société d'éditions littéraires et artistiques, 1901), 5, 7. On *La Cina*, see Dorian Bell, *Globalizing Race: Antisemitism and Empire in French and European Culture* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 270–74. On Bertrand, see Christopher Churchill, "Neo-Traditionalist Fantasies: Colonialism, Modernism and Fascism in Greater France 1870–1962," (PhD diss., Queen's University, Kingston, 2010), chaps. 3 and 4.

[29] Bertrand, *La Cina*, 8.

[30] Ibid., 10.

[31] Louis Bertrand, "La Renaissance classique" in Joachim Gasquet, *Les Chants séculaires* (Paris: Société d'éditions littéraires et artistiques, 1903), XLVI, XLVII.

[32] Louis Bertrand, *La Grèce du soleil et des paysages* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1908), XXII.

[33] Louis Bertrand, *La Fin du classicisme et le retour à l'antique dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle et les premières années du XIX^e, en France* (Paris: Hachette, 1897), XV. See also the comments on Velázquez in Louis Bertrand, "Lettre sur la peinture espagnole," *Les Mois dorés*, 1896, 152.

[34] Bertrand, *La Grèce du soleil*, XXX.

[35] Louis Bertrand, *Les Villes d'or. Algérie et Tunisie romaines* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1921), 23.

of Latin countries to France's colonies in the southern Mediterranean not only to relieve them of a supposed moral and material torpor but to inspire a rebirth of the metropolis itself. The colonists who figure in his novels embody a virile myth of Latinity, especially invested in Spanish characters—waggoners, fishermen, and farmers—who contrast not only with the degenerate French bourgeoisie but also with a vicious and unruly working class.

Especially after a grand tour of the Mediterranean countries made in 1906, Bertrand became increasingly fearful of a dual ethnic and social crisis that endangered the future of Latin culture and demanded a response both in France and in Algeria. His 1907 novel *L'invasion* revisits the working-class districts of Marseille which, six years earlier, had impressed with their popular vigor. Now he discovers there the dregs of society. Bertrand is particularly contemptuous of the southern Italians, whom he accuses of engaging in vice and crime, but the danger also comes from further afield: the author warns the reader of Russian anarchists, of the "Jews of Odessa," even of "a few Japanese, who called themselves socialists," all ready to ignite the powder among an idle and rebellious Italian population. The precedents are troubling: "So the Asiatic scum, as in the days of the agony of Rome, once again flowed back to the Latin shore."[36] On the other side of the sea, the situation seemed to him just as dire. Visits to Turkey and Egypt in 1906 introduced Bertrand to the *Nahda*, a pan-Islamic movement that sought to reconcile faith with democracy and modernity. Such an awakening of the Arab world greatly worried this booster of French imperialism who, in his first works, depicted an Algeria where the indigenous population scarcely appears. In a gesture of racial concealment, Bertrand implies that French colonization is only renewing the primordial links established by Rome and temporarily interrupted by the arrival of Islam from the 7th century onwards.[37] Algeria is therefore Latin and Islam a parenthesis that has only served to slow down the progress of the country, which remains frozen in a past where Bertrand discovers the vestiges of the ancient world:

> Here, almost nothing has changed. In spite of the political and religious revolutions, the customs, the moral atmosphere remained identical [. . .] This is why, in no Latin country are the ruins more evocative than in North Africa. The unchanging environment helps in the resurrection of the most distant history.[38]

As proof of the persistence of Latin affinities below the "trompe-l'oeil of modern Islamic décor,"[39] Bertrand evokes the ancient remains in Tipasa and Lambaesa where, he says, a Frenchman would experience in the highest degree "the filial emotion which, for him, emerges from this land so strongly shaped by Latin genius and reconquered, after so many centuries, at the cost of the blood of [our] fathers."[40]

In evoking this revival of civilization through Latinity, Bertrand speaks of "rebarbarization"—a vision of renewal rooted in a notion of southern energy where the author demonstrates certain affinities with Nietzsche.[41] His defense of a virile classicism encouraged Bertrand to harbor an antipathy to Christian pity and charity which found an echo in Joachim Gasquet, who described his former high school teacher in 1899 as representing "all the seeds of this pagan renaissance from which the literature of the next century will draw its noblest glory."[42] Gasquet, who maintained warm relations with Mistral and in 1902 joined his former classmate Charles Maurras's Action française, extols the royalist's "love of order, of clarity, of 'Mediterranean harmony'," which reminds him of both the classical aesthetic of Bertrand and the Provençal

[36] Louis Bertrand, *L'invasion* (Paris, Fasquelle, 1907), 383–84, quoted in Aurélia Dusserre, "L'image des étrangers à Marseille dans *L'invasion* de Louis Bertrand (1907)" in Mourlane et Regnard, *Les Batailles de Marseille*, 25.

[37] See Rabah Belamri, *L'oeuvre de Louis Bertrand. Miroir de l'idéologie colonialiste* (Hydra: Office des publications universitaires, 1980), chap. 6.

[38] Louis Bertrand, *Le Jardin de la mort* (Paris: Paul Ollendorf, 1905), 157–58.

[39] Louis Bertrand, preface, *Le Sang des races* (1899), (Paris: Albin Michel, 1930), quoted in Belamri, *L'oeuvre de Louis Bertrand*, 238.

[40] Bertrand, *Jardin de la mort*, 159. On the continuity between the Roman colony and modern Algeria, see Nabila Oulebsir, *Les Usages du patrimoine. Monuments, musées et politique coloniale en Algérie (1830-1930)* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2004), 284–87.

[41] See, in particular, Louis Bertrand, "Nietzsche et la Méditerranée," *Revue des deux mondes,* January 1915, 174–86.

[42] Review of Bertrand's *Le Sang des races* in Joachim Gasquet, "Les Idées et les faits," *Le Pays de France* no. 5, May 1899, 311.

lyricism of the poet of Maillane.[43] There is nevertheless a real tension between the Apollonian classicism of Maurras and Mistral and the more robust vision advanced by Bertrand. Gasquet's regionalism, inspired by the two southern masters, led him to discern in Provence "a new Greece, where the human spirit will take refuge" in the face of "terrible storms unleashed on our Europe" which endanger the very survival of civilization.[44] Shortly before the First World War, Gasquet abandoned his earlier Catholic faith and identified with a paganism which he believed represented the triumph of hierarchy and discipline over a disorderly nature that continually threatens us with annihilation.[45] For him, the Provençal landscape retained the Arcadian spirit of an idyllic Golden Age, a spirit buried in the red earth and the pines of the countryside surrounding Aix which shelter the reincarnated presence of an eternal Latin race, whose souls have permeated the ground, the sky and the light. Gasquet foresees a Provençal rebirth, signaled by the birth of a child, which would herald the advent of a new Golden Age, the theme of Virgil's fourth Eclogue, taken up by the poet in his work *L'Enfant* in 1900.[46] Gasquet's classicism inspired his promotion of Provençal culture—which he celebrated in his monograph on Cézanne, written in 1912–13, but published posthumously in 1921—and prompted his intervention in artistic life in Marseille before 1914, by which he linked the myth of the city's Greco-Latin origins with its contemporary identity.

Paul Cézanne, a former classmate of his father whom Gasquet first encountered in 1896, symbolized that side of the poet's Latinism that equates Mediterranean culture both with classical reason and with an inherited sense of ordered community embodied in the Provençal peasantry.[47] Cézanne's return to his roots in 1870, following almost a decade in Paris serves, in Gasquet's telling, as a necessary assertion of personal discipline and aesthetic order that saved the painter from a debilitating subordination to instinct that had sapped him during his years away from home:

> In Paris, everything oppressed, spoiled and inhibited him. Let him draw strength from nature. That of his own land, which is in harmony with his blood. It is only here, in Provence, that he will free himself from the dissipating effect of Romanticism. He paints before the classical sea. These waves brought civilization, order, restraint, and wisdom to the old Celtic forests. These roads that he travels with his easel on his back are the legacy of Rome's great realism. Rather than dreaming with a brush in his hand, he must follow Virgil in subjecting himself to the school of the material world [l'école des choses].[48]

In his extensive discussions of Cézanne's landscape technique, Gasquet insists on the artist's exacting struggle for ontological and perceptual self-mastery, achieved by reconciling rational insight with emotional force. Cézanne's hard-won transformation into a "precise lyrical artist"[49] is facilitated by the nature of the "classical land" itself, with "the intelligent line of its hills, its horizons shimmering in the maritime air" that allow him to develop an "art that is realist and classical in expression which took his entire life to master."[50] Yet Gasquet's elevation of Apollonian order and restraint—and of Cézanne's unrivalled mastery—comes under pressure in the years before 1914 as he increasingly responds to a countervailing Dionysian classicism. This exaltation of pagan sensuality encourages him to promote Auguste Renoir as an artist who ostensibly achieves an ideal balance between reason and sensuality that, in a rhetorical realignment, Gasquet presents as quintessentially French: "[Renoir's] very lucidity already instils a sort of intoxication. That is where his French charm lies."[51]

[43] Joachim Gasquet, "Les Idées et les faits," *Le Pays de France* no. 15, March 1900, 185.
[44] Ibid., 195.
[45] On Gasquet's political and aesthetic thought, see Neil McWilliam, *L'esthétique de la réaction. Tradition, foi, identité et l'art français (1900-1914)* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2021), 271–335.
[46] This idea was first explored in Paul Smith, "Joachim Gasquet, Virgil, and Cézanne's Landscape: My Beloved Golden Age," *Apollo* vol. 148, no. 439, October 1998, 11–23.
[47] On Gasquet's assessment of the stoical acceptance of one's place in the world exhibited by Cézanne's peasants, see Joachim Gasquet, 'Le Sang provençal,' *Les Mois dorés* March–April 1898, 373–381.
[48] Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne* (Paris: Éditions Bernheim-Jeune, 1921), 40.
[49] Gasquet, *Cézanne*, 45.
[50] Ibid., 9, 15.
[51] Joachim Gasquet, [Le Salon de mai], *Le Feu* no. 85, May 1912, 489. See also, Joachim Gasquet, "Sur Renoir. À propos de ses derniers nus," *Les Marges* vol. 13, no. 47, March 1914, 188–92.

Both Renoir and Cézanne, together with Auguste Rodin, serve as the presiding spirits behind Gasquet's attempt, in 1912, to raise the cultural profile of Marseille as part of what André Salmon later described as his promotion of a "Mediterranean school of painters."[52] Describing the city as a crossroads "on the brink of the great paths to Africa," capable of "nourishing [. . .] the Mediterranean lake," from which "civilization radiates" across Europe,[53] Gasquet regarded Marseille as the forcing ground of an artistic synthesis which would reconcile sensuality and spirituality in a revitalized, pagan classicism. The crucible for such a transformation was to be an exhibition of contemporary art, the "Salon de mai," held in the studio of the painter Alfred Lombard in the Vieux Port. The show brought together 74 works by 35 artists, including Pierre Bonnard, Charles Camoin, Maurice Denis, Charles Guérin, Pierre Laprade, Maximilien Luce, Georges Rouault, Ker-Xavier Roussel, and Paul Signac. Prominent among this roster of established, nationally recognized figures, were several artists with strong local connections, notably Alfred Lombard, whom Gasquet had first met in 1905, Jules Flandrin, a former pupil of Gustave Moreau, and Pierre Girieud, who had returned to the south in 1911 after a decade spent among the Parisian avant-garde.[54] Both Lombard and Girieud played key roles in organizing the exhibition, for which Renoir and Rodin agreed to serve as 'Présidents d'honneur.' Yet, beyond their honorific role, these two luminaries, together with their deceased contemporary Cézanne, were represented by works that formed the armature around which Gasquet elaborated a complex theoretical exercise, plotting a new direction for art in which his three young companions implicitly stood as symbolic heirs.[55]

In Gasquet's account, the older generation forms a trinity in which Renoir reconciled the Dionysian sensuality of Rodin with the rational Apollonian impulse of Cézanne in a synthesis that elevated him as "painting's great Mediterranean son" whose example permeates contemporary art: "[Cézanne] is called master, because he stands as the master for some. Renoir is the master of everyone. [. . .] There is a little of him in the fervent shadings of every color."[56] Among younger artists, Pierre Girieud's work represents an Apollonian dedication to "sharp observation and reasoned meditation," while Gasquet predicts that Lombard's expansive, Dionysian vision will "embody the confidence of the world" in vast, emotionally charged frescoes.[57] Between the two, Jules Flandrin—a scion of Grenoble rather than Provence—epitomizes a blending of sense and intellect, with a "pagan soul" that confirms him as "the son of Poussin."[58] It is these three, among the host of post-Impressionist and neo-Fauvist painters assembled in the "Salon de mai," whom Gasquet identifies as the great masters of the future, envisioning their work as revitalizing the legacy of Greece and Rome in a new monumental art that will overcome prevailing decadence and individualism to forge a "school of robust health" made up of artists who are "classical, lyrical, epic, disciplined, [. . .] dense, dramatic, and passionate."[59]

The three painters in whom Gasquet invested his hopes for the future all had more or less well-established careers at the time of the Salon de mai. Lombard, the youngest at 28, had remained in the south since his professional début in 1905 and, following a brief exploration of a loose, highly colored Fauvist technique, had gravitated towards a more solidly constructed, monumental style, epitomized at its least alluring in his sole exhibit at the Salon de mai, *Fortunia* (Fig. 4), a reclining nude whose stolid presence stands out against the more broadly

[52] André Salmon, "Les Arts et la vie. La Peinture. Examen des Salons," *La Revue de France* 8th year, vol. 4, August 1928, 537.
[53] Joachim Gasquet, "Vers une renaissance européenne. Les Vertus païennes," *L'Action* no. 3980, 4 June 1914, 1.
[54] On Alfred Lombard see Giulia Pentcheff, *Alfred Lombard (1884–1973)*, Galerie Alexis Pentcheff, Marseille, 2019; on Girieud, exh. cat. Musée Cantini, Marseille, 1996, *Pierre Girieud et l'expérience de la modernité 1900-1912.* The artist's autobiography, "Souvenirs d'un vieux peintre," appears on a website devoted to the artist, http://www.pierregirieud.fr/souvenir/souv1.htm (consulted 12 May 2021); on Jules Flandrin, see Juliet Simpson et al, *Jules Flandrin, 1871–1947: the Other Fin de siècle*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2001 and exh, cat. Musée de l'Ancien Éveché, Grenoble, 2008, *Jules Flandrin. Examen sensible. Oeuvres de 1889 à 1914.*
[55] The three emblematic exhibits were: Auguste Rodin, *Faunesse à genoux*, bronze, 1887, Private Collection; Auguste Renoir, *Baigneuse s'essuyant,* c. 1901–1902, Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia; and Paul Cézanne, *Madame Cézanne dans un fauteuil jaune,* c. 1888–1890, Beyeler Foundation, Basel. The "Salon de mai" is discussed in Pentcheff, *Alfred Lombard*, 60–63; its conceptual underpinning is analyzed in McWilliam, *L'esthétique de la réaction*, 315–23.
[56] Gasquet, [Le Salon de mai], *Le Feu* no. 85, May 1912, 490, 491.
[57] Ibid., 521, 529.
[58] Joachim Gasquet, 'Jules Flandrin,' *L'Art et les artistes* n.s., vol. 1, no. 1, April 1919, 24. According to a note on p. 22, the article dates from June 1914. Gasquet, [Le Salon de mai], *Le Feu* no. 85, May 1912, 517.
[59] Joachim Gasquet, 'Le Printemps d'un art,' *Le Feu* no. 85, May 1912, 464, 462.

Figure 4. Alfred Lombard, *Fortunia*, 1911, oil on canvas, dimensions & present whereabouts unknown, Reproduced in *Salon de mai 1912: première exposition, Marseille*. Photo: Author.

painted background with its classical decorative motifs.

Extolled by Gasquet as "our great lyrical [artist]" and a worthy successor to Delacroix, Lombard is promised a great future in which "He will fix, in material symbols, cosmic emotion, the universal frisson that today animates the races' blood and the loving soul of men."[60] Five years younger than Lombard, Girieud had enjoyed a relatively successful international career, notably in Russia and Germany, cultivating a form of synthetic symbolist style composed of flat colors and frequently angular forms (Fig. 5), though his return to Marseille in 1911 marked both a distancing from the Parisian avant-garde and the adoption of an increasingly austere classical style that encouraged Gasquet to compare his work with Ingres, Chassériau and Puvis. *The Three Graces* (Fig. 6), his contribution to the Salon de mai, presents three harmoniously linear figures in a southern landscape, and represents, for Gasquet, a form of pictorial manifesto: "it will mark a moment [une étape], a summation [un état] of contemporary painting."[61]

Finally, older than his companions at 41 and the symbolic pivot of the group, Jules Flandrin ironically appears the most anodyne in his rather eclectic evolution during which he had dipped into various post-Impressionist currents without committing himself to a distinctive style (Fig. 7).

His three exhibits in 1912—a landscape, a flower painting, and an ideal landscape reminiscent of Corot—*Matin antique, souvenir de la Méditerranée* (1912, Musée de Grenoble; on deposit since 1975 in the mairie de Corenc)—, elicit the most effusive response from Gasquet, who proclaims: "In a Virgilian light, Flandrin harmonizes the verses [équilibre les stances] of our fervor. He paints our

[60] Gasquet, [Le Salon de mai], *Le Feu* no. 85, May 1912, 528, 529.

[61] Ibid., 520.

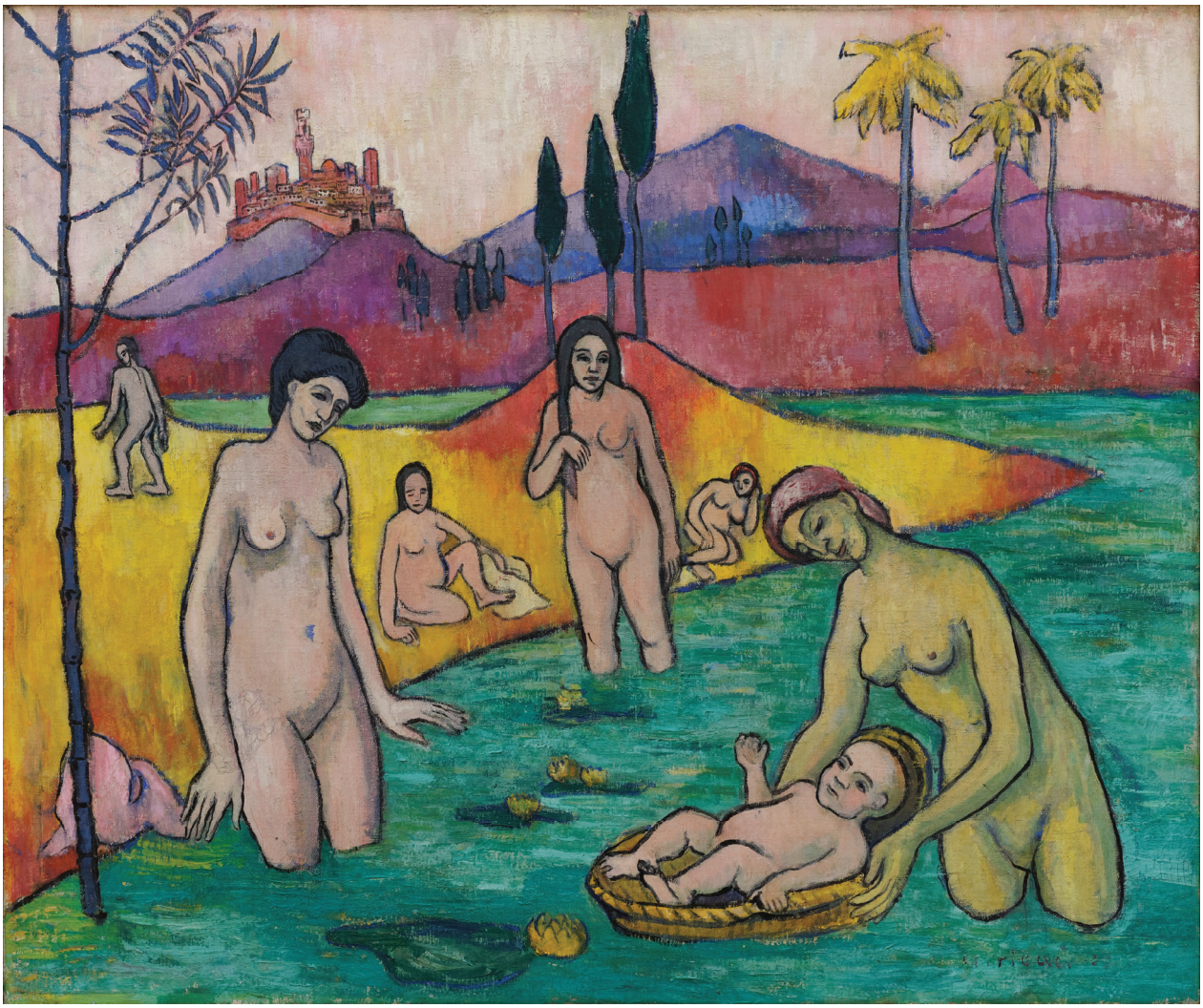

Figure 5. Pierre Girieud, *The Finding of Moses*, 1907, oil on canvas, 54.5 x 65.5 cm. Musée de Grenoble. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

golden age. No one before him has better realized our dreams." The decorative quality of Flandrin's work, its appeal to the senses and its capacity to inspire joy, suggest to Gasquet a transfiguration of the present through art, or "if he takes me elsewhere, to one of the ages past, he makes me feel my origins, the natural continuity of the air, of the earth, and of men."[62]

In distinctive, though complementary ways, each artist signifies for Gasquet an artistic rebirth rooted in a distinctively Mediterranean, classical culture that links present and past while achieving an equilibrium between sense and intellect, the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. Encouraging all three artists to revitalize their creative vision through engaging with tradition, Gasquet offered practical guidance to Girieud and Lombard, soliciting a commission for them, together with Georges Dufrénoy (another participant in the Salon de mai) for a series of frescoes in a chapel on the estate of his friend, Douglas Fitch, in Grambois (Vaucluse). Adapting techniques from Cennino Cennini's recently translated *Libro dell'Arte* (c. 1390), the artists decorated the narthex with scenes from the Gospels, though Girieud's *Adoration of the Shepherds and Kings* (Fig. 8) and Lombard's *Sermon on the Mount* (Fig. 9) both incorporate features that gesture towards Gasquet's sense of historical continuity and his conflation of Christian and Virgilian

[62] Ibid., 514,

Figure 6. Pierre Girieud, *The Three Graces*, 1912, oil on canvas, 200 x 180 cm. Artcurial, Paris, sold on 1 December 2010. Photo: Artcurial.

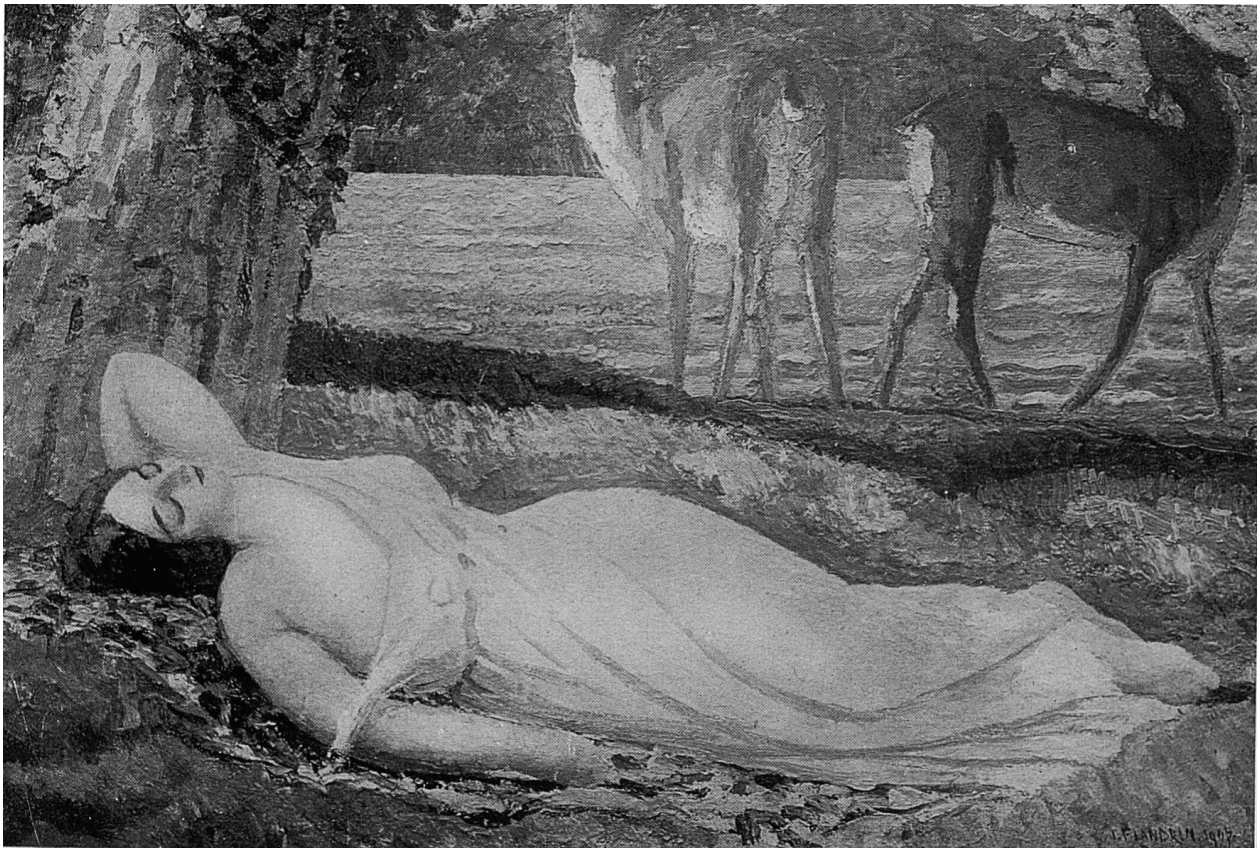

Figure 7. Jules Flandrin, *Sleep*, 1907, oil on canvas, dimensions and present whereabouts unknown. Reproduced in Joachim Gasquet, "Jules Flandrin," *L'art et les artistes*, April 1919, p. 21. Photo: Author.

Figure 8. Pierre Girieud, *Adoration of the Shepherds and Kings,* 1912, Fresco, dimensions unknown, Ermitage de Saint-Pancrace, Grambois, Vaucluse. Photo: Author.

Figure 9. Alfred Lombard*, The Sermon on the Mount*, 1912, Fresco, dimensions unknown, Ermitage de Saint-Pancrace, Grambois, Vaucluse. Photo: Author.

Figure 10. Alfred Lombard, *The Triumph of Life* (central section), outline drawing reproduced in André Warnod, "Les Fresques de la Faculté des sciences de Marseille," *Comoedia* no. 2414, p. 3. Photo: Author.

prophesies of civilizational renewal that had inspired *L'Enfant*.

Both Girieud and Lombard situate their Biblical scenes in the Provençal landscape (the chapel itself appears in the background of the Nativity), while both feature contemporary protagonists. Gasquet appears prominently as a Magus, kneeling before the Virgin, modeled by his wife Marie, while he and all three artists join other contemporaries among the antique audience listening to Christ's sermon. The draped figures in both scenes, dressed in chitons and tunics reminiscent of Greece and Rome, further allude to the classical prism through which the artists refract the Gospel narratives and the resonance this history has for the Mediterranean renaissance presaged by this Provençal nativity.[63]

The ancient world and the modern Mediterranean city came together in a final project, applauded by Gasquet, and commissioned from Girieud and Lombard on the eve of the First World War. Charged by the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Marseille to provide frescoes for their new complex in the Saint-Charles district, designed by Victor Blavette and begun in 1911, Lombard and Girieud developed decorative schemes for lecture theaters devoted to Natural Sciences, and Physics and Mathematics that seemingly draw upon the dichotomy of Dionysian and Apollonian impulses with which Gasquet had identified the artists in his presentation of the "Salon de mai."[64]

Though the project was aborted with the outbreak of war, surviving sketches show Lombard celebrating *The Triumph of Life* (Fig. 10) in a highly animated classical allegory that displays "the struggle of passions and species, the work of men and the effort of races around a natural goddess who presses a symbolic bird's nest to her breast."[65] Girieud's work (Fig. 11), judged calmer and more

[63] The frescoes are discussed in McWilliam, *L'esthétique de la réaction*, 324–25 and Pentcheff, *Alfred Lombard*, 103–110. Among articles by Gasquet, see, "Les Fresques de Pradines," *L'Art décoratif*, vol. 30, December 1913, 259–66. See also André Warnod, "Des fresques dans une chapelle à Saint-Pancrace," *Comoedia* 16 December 1913, 3.

[64] On the project, see Florence Marciano, "La faculté des Sciences Saint-Charles à Marseille: le grand œuvre de Victor Blavette," *Livraisons d'histoire de l'architecture* vol. 13, 2007, 89–103.

[65] Joachim Gasquet, "La Jeune Peinture. La Renaissance de la fresque," *L'Action* no. 8959, 14 May 1914, 1. See also André Warnod, "Les Fresques de la Faculté des sciences de Marseille," *Comoedia* no. 2414, 12 May 1914, 3.

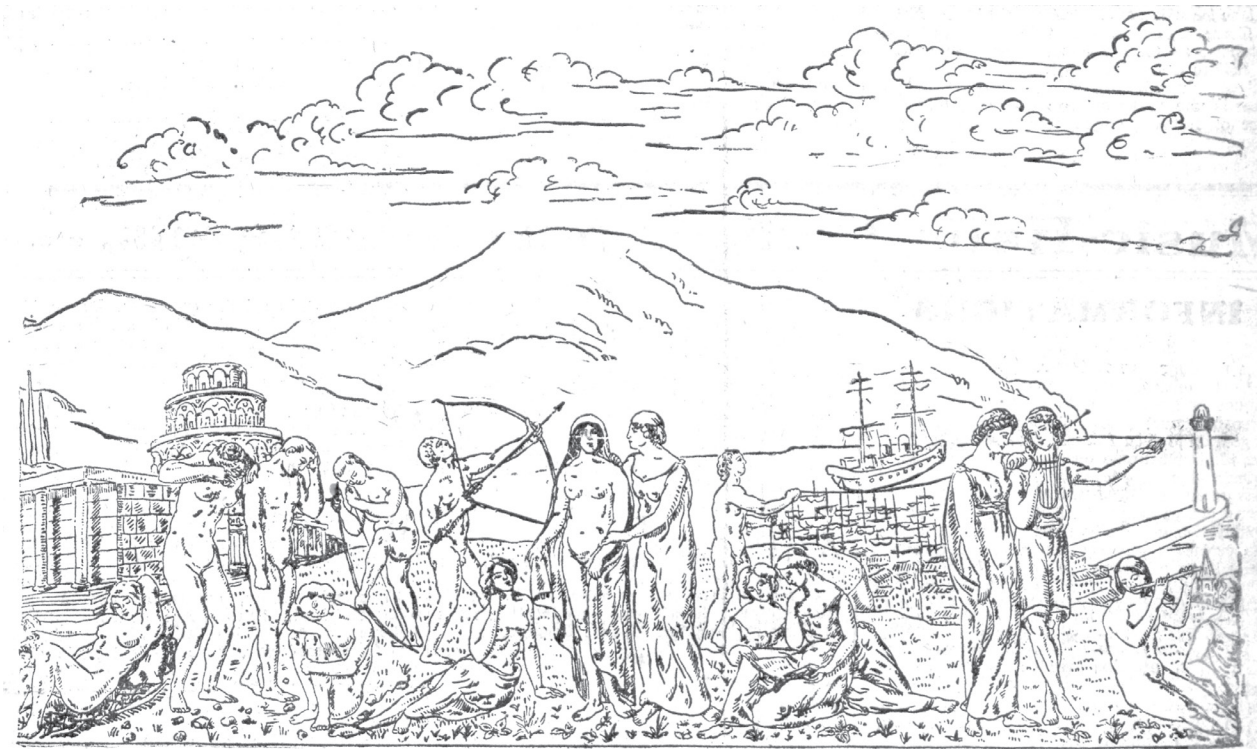

Figure 11. Pierre Girieud, *Physics and Mathematics* (central section), outline drawing reproduced in André Warnod, "Les Fresques de la Faculté des sciences de Marseille," *Comoedia* no. 2414, p. 3. Photo: Author.

cerebral by Gasquet, centers on an allegory of Truth flanked on the right by Orpheus and Eurydice, with Adam and Eve on the left in front of the Tower of Babel, symbolizing the perils of knowledge. The other figures, predominantly female nudes, embody the different disciplines to which the building was devoted. All of this takes place against the backdrop of a modern Mediterranean port, with a large two-masted vessel off shore. The contrast with the setting for *The Triumph of Life*—with its lush vegetation, palm trees, flamingos, and fishing boat that resembles a dhow—is striking. While Girieud's generic landscape and mythological allusions evoke a northern Mediterranean tradition, Lombard gestures towards more exotic climes, plausibly identifiable with the southern shores of the African coast. In these adjacent images, two conceptions of the Mediterranean come together. North and south, Apollo and Dionysus, reason and sensuality, Maurras and Bertrand reach out to each other in a pagan synthesis inspired by Gasquet's evocation of artistic renewal through the Greco-Latin heritage of the ocean as a crucible of civilizations.